

THE AMUSEMENT HALL

The Town Hall, which is now a cannery, was built in the early days by a group of five townsmen, instigated by Moroni Gerber.

An excerpt from the journal of Moroni Gerber who moved here as a small boy in the 1860's with his family. His father was a Swiss doctor. Moroni was living in Midway in 1894 and he tells us the following:

"Some time in the late fall of 1894 or 95, the Primary arranged for a children's dance to be given in the Van Wagoner Hall. Accordingly, I took my children in the wagon to town, and, to my surprise and disgust, I found the primary children very much disappointed. The hall had been rented to a travelling troop, and it was being arranged for a play of some kind. In talking with a number of parents and the President of the Primary, I told them to submit to the abuse and not make any trouble for the management of the play. I further said that we would have a hall of our own by another year.

This statement I soon forgot, but I was reminded of it the next February by Charles Bronson who called my attention to it. He asked me when we were going to start to build the hall. It was a surprise to me, having thought no more of my past remark. He said the boys were ready to go. All they lacked was a building leader. He further stated that I'd have plenty of support if I'd go ahead. I immediately proposed a meeting for the following evening to select a building committee. I was delighted to have about thirty of the leading young men present, anxious to go ahead and build the hall.

Geo. Bonner, Jr., presented the building spot, and a committee of five was appointed, myself being one of the number. This committee met and decided on building the hall of pot rock and also set the date to begin, Monday, February 22. Through misunderstanding of the date, only one man was out to haul rock, yet he hauled the full day. This man was Everice Bronson. The next day there were plenty of teams and single hands to do the work. There were about two feet of snow on the ground.

The site which was staked off was cleared of snow preparatory to digging the foundation. We decided to build the hall 80 feet long, 50 feet wide and 16 feet or the square. We excavated the place for a foundation and basement, this last being 20 X 50 ft. The labor for the entire building was performed by local men taking their pay in shares in the corporation. The hall was completed, and the opening dance held the following Xmas eve. From that time until the present, the children of Midway have had a free hall for amusement."

p. 85 of Journal of Moroni Gerber.

The Amusement Hall, as it was called later, was originally called the "Midway Opera House". It had a beautiful rolled curtain with a scene of Venice painted on it. There was a huge roller on the bottom that cranked up and raised the curtain. When a scene was ended, they just released the catch and the roller unrolled and let the curtain fall to the floor. Many dances, as well as operas and plays by local talent, were held there.

In this old dance hall, "toe" parties, "bow" parties, and box suppers were held. All the teenagers would go with their parents and have a wonderful time. At intermission they would raffle off, auction off, or vote for the various boxes of lunch the women had provided. The men paid the fiddler and the women provided the refreshments. Many a time the young boys ended up eating dinner with grandmothers because they'd vote on her lunch not knowing who had made the box. Sometimes they'd have the women stand behind a sheet with a bare foot sticking out. One could pick out his partner by the identification of her feet! Whoever a fellow chose by this identification he had supper with. Sometimes during intermissions, if the people who got together for their lunch lived close to the hall, they would go to their homes to eat their lunch, and then back to the hall to finish the dance.

Floyd Bonner, whose uncle was George Bonner, Jr. tells us of the use of the "Town Hall".

"Memories that are the most vivid for me as a child were those of July 4th and 24th. The day began with cannonading, at daylight followed by the Martial Band which went all around the town. Many of the residents would bring them out refreshments as they went along, and they would stop and visit a few minutes.

The parade came next followed by a lengthy patriotic program. This was held in the Amusement Hall, what is now the Stake Welfare Building. It was decorated gaily with yards and yards of red, white and blue bunting and many flags. The program always included patriotic speeches, songs, and readings. It always concluded with a patriotic drill using most of the young people carrying flags. It took many practices to get it perfect.

In the afternoon there was always a children's dance and ball game which everyone enjoyed and went to cheer along their team. In the evening a dance was held in the Amusement Hall and mothers of young children brought them with blankets and made beds up on the stage where they could sleep while Mom and Dad enjoyed an evening of dancing."

This hall was later operated by the L.D.S. Church as a stake cannery. People were able to take their produce in the fall and their meat after hunting, to this cannery, and by preparing the food, have it processed through the mechanical operations of the cannery which was quite modern. There were sealers, steam cookers, and all the other apparatus necessary to provide an efficient cannery operation.

It is at the present time not in operation.

The Amusement Hall/Cannery

